



# THE ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY

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JOSHUA LEDERBERG

PRESIDENT

SEP 16 1985

Dear Victor:

Our [CISAC] meeting in Moscow achieved every reasonable expectation (not to set that too high!) about reopening discussions with Soviet scientists aimed at bolstering the Biological Weapons Disarmament Treaty. As they have now expressed some receptivity to further discussion, we obviously have the obligation to firm up our objectives. The overarching aim of reducing the odds of biological warfare is easily stated. Translating that into concrete and feasible steps is much more difficult.

The most proximate threats of BW come from its availability to small states and terrorist groups -- the virtual "poor man's nuclear weapon" -- for clandestine attack on populations. How to cope with terrorism is already one of the most vexing contemporary problems: the potential aggravation from BW that much the worse.

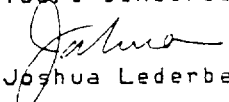
This is compounded by the anxieties that stem from the limitations of the treaty, which do not deal effectively with military R&D, nor with the prospects of rapid breakout of civil biotechnology, which is advancing so rapidly today. Concern about continued Soviet investment in BW R&D, heightened by matters like the Sverdlovsk incident (1979), has been sharpened by the Soviets' categorical refusal to discuss the area. This stance makes difficult concerted measures on horizontal proliferation, and in due course may motivate a reentry by the US into military BW R&D.

My own imagination has been quite limited about what might be done; at the very least we might explore what measures could restore some degree of confidence about the bilateral problem. The Soviets' official position about Sverdlovsk has been that it was an anthrax epidemic of limited scope, originating in contaminated black-market meat. The biologists I have talked to have had no reason to doubt that version; nor have they had access to any detailed information themselves. They may (or may not) be able to help a process of more open discussion of that incident, which would be a confidence-building measure in its own right (even if Sverdlovsk was a seat of BW R&D -- whose proscription under the treaty is only the vaguest.)

We have such a complex blend of biotechnical and political issues that it would be indispensable to have a more extensive discussion before we continue the discussions with the Soviets (at CISAC or some derivative group). Would it be possible to convene an informal, mixed group to meet in Washington to help take stock before we (CISAC) proceeds further?

If you do call such a meeting, it would be fine with me were you to distribute any of the background that was given out to CISAC before the Moscow trip, including the "tutorial".

Yours sincerely,

  
Joshua Lederberg